

Message Text

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ACTION EA-12

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L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

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FM AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5596

INFO AMCONSUL MEDAN

AMCONSUL SURABAYA

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, ID

SUBJECT: RESPONSE TO ABRI STATEMENT

REF: JAKARTA 16822

1. SUMMARY. PRESIDENT SUHARTO, WHILE ENDORSING THE DECEMBER 15 ARMED FORCES (ABRI) STATEMENT AGAINST DISSENT, HAS CAUTIONED ABRI NOT TO "GENERALIZE" ITS RESPONSE TO SPECIFIC ACTS OF DISSIDENCE INTO A GENERAL CRACKDOWN. ABRI COMMANDER GEN. PANGGABEAN, NONETHELESS, REITERATED THAT CONTINUED ILLEGAL DISSIDENT ACTS WILL BE MET WITH "ARRESTS AND IMPRISONMENT." END SUMMARY.

2. FOLLOWING THE DECEMBER 15 RELEASE OF A FIRM ABRI STATEMENT AIMED AT DEMONSTRATING THE UNITY OF THE ARMED FORCES AND DISCOURAGING DISSIDENT ACTIVITY (REFTEL), THE ABRI LEADERSHIP MET WITH PRESIDENT SUHARTO TO OUTLINE THEIR PLANS FOR DEALING WITH DISSIDENCE. ABRI COMMANDER GEN. PANGGABEAN, QUERIED AFTERWARDS BY THE PRESS, RELAYED THE PRESIDENT'S PRAISE FOR ABRI'S UNITY AND DETERMINATION TO MAINTAIN ORDER AND GUARANTEE THE SUCCESS OF NEXT MARCH'S MPR. ACCORDING TO LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PANGGABEAN, SUHARTO URGED THE MILITARY TO RESPECT POLITICAL RIGHTS AND "STRICTLY ADHERE TO EXISTING LAWS," BUT TO "TAKE FIRM STEPS AGAINST THE USE OF FORCE." PANGGABEAN NOTED, HOWEVER, THAT THE PRESIDENT ALSO ORDERED ABRI TO BE "CAREFUL" IN RESPONDING TO SPECIFIC ACTS OF DISSIDENCE AND NOT TO "GENERALIZE" ITS RESPONSE INTO AN ACROSS-THE-BOARD CRACKDOWN ON ALL FORMS OF OPPOSITION.

3. SPEAKING FOR HIMSELF, PANGGABEAN WENT ON TO SAY THAT ABRI HOPED THAT THERE WERE NO "ELEMENTS WHO DO NOT WANT TO ACCEPT THE CONTENTS OF OUR STATEMENT, WHO WILL CONTINUE THEIR UNCONSTITUTIONAL ACTIVITY." IF THERE ARE SUCH GROUPS, HE CONCLUDED, THE ARMED FORCES HAVE NO CHOICE BUT TO FOLLOW A POLICY OF "ARREST AND IMPRISONMENT."

4. EAST JAVA MILITARY COMMANDER WITARMIN, WHO WAS PRESENT FOR THE FORMAL PRESENTATION OF THE ABRI STATEMENT, APPARENTLY RUSHED BACK TO SURABAYA IMMEDIATELY AFTERWARDS, TO CONVENE HIS OWN PRESS CONFERENCE AND REPEAT THE INTENTIONS OF THE EAST JAVA AUTHORITIES TO "DEAL FIRMLY" WITH ANY NEW DISSIDENCE. HE ALSO ACKNOWLEDGED THE EXISTENCE OF "RUMORS WHICH ARE FREQUENTLY HEARD IN EAST JAVA" THAT ELEMENTS OF ABRI SUPPORT THE DISSIDENTS. THE DECEMBER 15 STATEMENT PROVES, SAID WITARMIN, THAT "ABRI IS UNITED" IN CONFRONTING THE DISSIDENT CHALLENGE.

5. THE PUBLIC STUDENT RESPONSE HAS SO FAR BEEN VERY MUTED. THE ACTIVIST VICE-CHAIRMAN OF THE UNIVERSITY OF INDONESIA STUDENT COUNCIL, FOR EXAMPLE, SAID THE STATEMENT DEMONSTRATES "THAT THERE IS MISUNDERSTANDING BETWEEN THE STUDENTS AND ABRI," ADDING THAT THE BEST WAY TO CLEAR UP MISUNDERSTANDING WAS "DIALOGUE NOT CONFRONTATION." SPOKESMEN FOR THE THREE POLITICAL PARTIES HAVE PUBLICLY WELCOMED THE ABRI LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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STATEMENT, THE GOLKAR SPOKESMAN WITH GREAT ENTHUSIASM, THE OTHERS LESS VOCALLY.

6. COMMENT. THE ABRI STATEMENT AND THE CRISIS ATMOSPHERE SURROUNDING ITS CREATION HAVE PREDICTABLY STIRRED UP THE JAKARTA RUMOR MILL. ONE (AS FAR AS WE KNOW GROUNDLESS) RUMOR CURRENTLY MAKING THE ROUNDS IS THAT RETIRED GEN. NASUTION HAS BEEN ARRESTED. OTHER RUMORS INEVITABLY WILL FOLLOW. SUHARTO'S WORDS OF CAUTION ARE PROBABLY INTENDED TO CALM THE ATMOSPHERE A BIT, BY PROVIDING ASSURANCE THAT LEGAL FORMS OF OPPOSITION WILL NOT BE SUPPRESSED. MASTERS

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